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HEALTH CONDITION ON THE ISTHMUS

Yellow Fever and Malaria on
Uncle Sam's Ten-Mile Strip
of Territory.

IS NOT A HEALTH RESORT

The Terrible Mosquito and How
He Works—Virtues of Citro-
nello Oil and Quinine.

By Frank G. Carpenter.

(Special Correspondent of The Times-Dispatch.)

PANAMA, April 3.—I want to give you some idea of the health conditions of the Isthmus of Panama. Most people think there is only a sheet of brown paper between this place and hades, and that our life is made up of a continuous fight with the climate. The truth is Panama would be a paradise if it were not for the fevers. The air here is as soft and sweet as that of Ohio in June. The Isthmus is only about forty miles wide, and the breezes from the Atlantic and the Pacific are always blowing this way and that. We go about in our summer clothes, but the average temperature is about 80, the nights are cool, and toward morning one needs an extra cover. At Colon and in the other mountains of Uncle Sam's zone, it is still colder and the air is still fresher. These conditions prevail about all the year round. It is never as hot as our Central States in midsummer and there is seldom a night when one is not able to sleep.

Not a Health Resort.

And still the Isthmus of Panama is not and never has been a health resort. The lowlands are swampy and there has been much malaria fever. About half the American employees have at one time or another been on the sick list and about 3 per cent. of the 4,000 men at work here are now in hospitals. We have had between thirty and forty cases of yellow fever during the past year, and about one-third of the yellow patients have died. This is not a high yellow fever death rate in a population of 40,000 or 50,000 and altogether the conditions are not bad considering the fact that we have just begun to wipe out the mosquitoes and to improve the sanitation and water supply. The percentage in the hospitals at present is not as large as at most of our army posts, and the malaria fever here is not to be compared in its injurious effects to the grip, typhoid or pneumonia, which they have at home.

Looking for Trouble.

Indeed, the man who comes to Panama is liable to get the fever from fright. The moment he leaves New York the passengers console with him upon the awful conditions. They go over the yellow fever cases of the last year, and the men who have been on the Isthmus tell stories of the deaths of the past. They relate how

when the Panama railroad was building the mortality was so great that a man died for each tie in the track, and some, perhaps, say that the funeral trains still move in and out, carrying the dead to Monkey Hill. The truth is, there have been no such trains for many years, and the story is of doubtful authenticity. The passenger, however, does not know this. He grows more and more alarmed as he lands at Colon and is handed a circular of health warning by the quarantine officers.

This circular is issued by the canal commission. In capital letters the word

careful. And in trying to frighten every American with whom he comes in contact into doing likewise.

When I entered the legation I found him as solemn as the traditional owl and as serious as one looking on the dying face of his best friend for the last time. He took me into his office and sat me down between him and a pot of Persian insect powder, which burned away, filling the room with a not unpleasant, but pungent smoke. I afterward learned that this was to stupefy the mosquitoes or kill them on the wing.

Before I could ask him to what loss he

and legs. If a female of that breed bites a yellow fever patient its blood becomes inoculated with yellow fever bacteria, and in case she then bites you, you will have the fever sure."

The Virtues of Citronella.

"But, by the way," the minister continued, "have you any citronella oil? The mosquito does not like the smell of that, and if you use it it will keep her away."

"Yes, I have some Mr. Minister," said I. "But have you rubbed it on you?"

"No, not yet."

away, stegomyia! Go away!" I woke at 3 A. M. and took a lamp inside my mosquito netting to see that no stegomyias were lying in ambush. At the same time from Washington, where there are no diseases more dangerous than grippe, typhoid fever, pneumonia and housemaid's knee. Indeed, I longed for the thrill of again chasing myself from under the wheels of the senatorial automobiles and the Capital Traction cars, and had the vulgarly known here as an attack of "cold feet." The feeling, however, left me as the day broke, and since then I have gone on, like the fatalist, using citronella, taking my three grains of quinine at bed time, and being careful of my eating and drinking. As a result, I have never been in better health, and I thoroughly enjoy life on the Isthmus. I am, however, under great obligations to Minister Barrett, whose emphatic lesson made me take care of myself. If others will adopt the same precautions they will reduce the percentage of disease here by several hundred per cent.

The Mosquitoes of Panama.

The chief diseases of Panama are, so the doctors say, all caused by mosquitoes. These diseases are yellow fever, malaria and elephantiasis. Each disease has its own peculiar kind of mosquito, and the female in every case does the work.

I had a talk with Colonel W. C. Gorgas, the chief sanitary officer here, about mosquitoes. He is the man who cleared Havana of yellow fever and who has been brought here to do the same for the Isthmus. He tells me that there are about two hundred different kinds of mosquitoes in the world, each having its own characteristics. None of the three I have mentioned is half as large or ferocious as the Jersey mosquito, and they are all getting no more than a passing mention. Each has its own customs and habits. The stegomyia usually bites in the daytime. It avoids bright light, and if a person's hand is on the table it will try to crawl under the hand and bite there. It often breeds in rain barrels and does not like dirty water.

The malaria mosquito is known as the anophele. It is dark in color, with four golden spots near the outer margin of the wing. It bites during the day, but its chief feeding time is at night. It is an out-of-door mosquito and is found especially in and about the swamps.

The elephantiasis mosquito is known as the culex fatigans. It bites night and day and is common in both town and country. This mosquito has a yellowish body with six silver bands on the abdomen. Elephantiasis is caused by a blood worm, and when the mosquito bites a person so diseased she sucks into her stomach blood containing such worms. The worms develop in her and finally reach her salivary glands so that when she bites another person the worms go into circulation and he has elephantiasis.

The doctors know all about the habits of each of these mosquitoes and they are doing everything to destroy them and their breeding places. For this reason they are draining the towns, cutting down the vegetation along the lines of the railroad and the canal, covering up the water barrels and putting oil on ponds. The swamps are being drained and every bit of stagnant water in and about the cities is taken away.

Precautions Against Yellow Fever.

The greatest precautions are taken to keep the employees from being bitten by mosquitoes of any kind. Every man is furnished with a mosquito net, and every American is supposed to sleep un-

der a mosquito net at night. The yellow fever patients of the hospitals are kept inside wire cages in rooms, the windows and doors of which are covered with wire netting, and every house which has the yellow fever is disinfected. Indeed, the whole city of Panama is being gradually thus treated. I daily pass through the streets after street, the houses of which show the marks of disinfection by the torn paper which has been pasted upon their doors and window cracks before fumigating. The other day a yellow fever case developed in the Grand Central Hotel at Panama. This is the biggest hotel on the Isthmus. Every room of that hotel had to be fumigated in consequence. This disgusted many of the lady guests, as it necessitated their moving out for the day and endangered the beauty of their clothes.

Indeed, I am surprised that the American women here show so little fear of yellow fever. They have reception and dinner parties just as you do in the United States, and at the dinners the ladies appear in low-neck dresses with their arms and shoulders bare, thus giving the mosquitoes a better chance to feast. So far I have not noticed the odor of citronella about one of these decollete dresses.

Malaria is common. There is this difference between malaria and yellow fever. The man who has yellow fever and gets well need not fear having it in the future. The malaria patient may be attacked again and again, but the disease is seldom fatal. Malaria succumbs quickly to quinine and it will be greatly reduced by wiping out the mosquitoes.

The doctors tell me that there are malarial germs in the blood of 70 per cent. of the Panama people. One of our doctors on the canal zone has a passion for investigating such matters. He grabs every man he meets, American or native, and takes a drop of blood out of his ear. He analyzes the blood, and in seven out of every ten he finds malarial bacteria. In some of the natives the blood is so infected that they are just able to crawl about. A good course of quinine, however, usually cleans up their systems and makes them well again. Another doctor examined forty-four children of a school at Bohio and found twenty-nine to have malarial organisms in their blood. He gave each of these children six grains of quinine at night and morning for ten days, and then tapped their ears for a second examination. At this time only five were found to have malaria. In other words, by that course of quinine he cured twenty-four out of twenty-nine cases of malaria in ten days. This work of the doctors is going on among all the employees of the canal and their natives of the zone. The health organization is excellent, and if Congress is more liberal in its appropriations the wiping out of the various diseases will be even more rapid than it is.

Our Hospitals at Panama.

The hospitals here will soon be among the finest of their kind. The French spent enormous sums in putting up buildings for the care of the sick, both at Colon and at Ancon on the edge of this city. Their buildings were in bad repair at the time we took hold, but the supervising architect has taken charge of them, and they are now in excellent condition. The French hospital at Colon is built on concrete foundations, upon a coral reef out over the sea. The patients can walk down the steps right into the sea, and the salt water breezes blow freely all the year through. This hospital has about 200 beds, and there are more in the Panama Railroad Hospital nearby. At Ancon there are already five hundred beds, and the arrangements are such that it will be possible to increase these to sev-

en hundred on short notice. An ice plant and cold storage rooms are to be put up there, and also a central steam kitchen, which will feed one thousand persons.

The Beauties of Ancon.

Indeed, I doubt whether there is a more beautiful spot in the world than Ancon Hill, on the slopes of which the Panama Hospital is situated. The hill rises almost straight up from the sea on the edge of Panama City, commanding a wide view of the Pacific Ocean and the Culebra Mountains. Its top is wooded and its lower slopes were laid out by the French in a great landscape garden. Beautiful driveways shaded by royal and coconut palms wind their way from level to level, and along them, surrounded by grassy lawns and tropical flowers and plants, stand the forty-odd cottages which make up the hospital. The houses are all of one-story, roofed with red tiles. They have high ceilings, wide doors and many windows. They are surrounded by verandas, and are so situated that the winds from the ocean and mountains blow through them day and night, year in and year out. The air is never hot at Ancon, and the windows and doors are so covered with netting that they can be always left open.

I spent some time going through the hospital. Many of the wards have patients convalescing. Here the boys sit on the beds and chat with one another, or move about from place to place. In other wards, they are kept apart, and in the yellow fever ward each patient lies in a bed inside a wire cage about ten feet high, eight feet wide and twelve feet long. This is to keep the patients away from the mosquitoes, and the mosquitoes away from the patients. The precautions are such, I am told, that not a mosquito has been found in the yellow fever ward since the first yellow fever patient was brought there months ago. This hospital and all the hospitals are in charge of efficient doctors and of American trained nurses.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

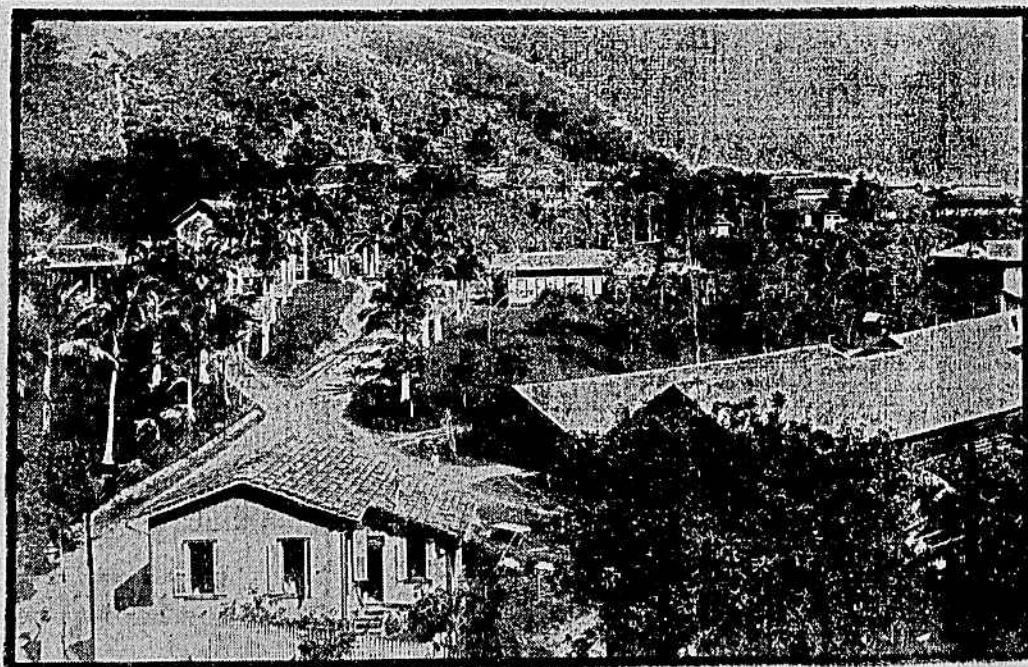
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GENERAL VIEW OF ANCON HOSPITALS.

MALARIA stands out in the first paragraph, and below it are directions how to escape it. The directions say that malaria comes from the bite of a female mosquito and they urge every one to use mosquito bars and take three grains of quinine each day before going to bed. The circular is signed by Colonel Gorgas, the chief sanitary officer.

I received such a circular on landing. I heard more fever stories when I went to the Washington House for my dinner, and as I crossed the Isthmus on the railroad a ghoulish friend pointed out Monkey Hill Cemetery as my future resting place and remarked: "That little station further on is known as Matachin," because two thousand Chinese died there."

My Yellow Fever Ghost.

My fears increased as I approached Panama city and were by no means allayed by a conversation I had upon arriving at the American legation, which has formed my home for a part of my stay.

Our minister to Panama, John W. Barrett, while he apparently has no fear of the fever himself, going everywhere and almost daily visiting the yellow fever wards of the hospitals, believes in being

was burning incense, he began about the fever, asking me if I were afraid of it. I replied that I was, but that he who was born to be hanged would never be drowned, and doubted whether Yellow Jack was to be the cause of my taking off.

"I hope not," said the minister; "and, indeed, I don't want to alarm you; but a woman had the yellow fever in that building to the right, a man has just been taken to the hospital from the building over there, and a third party is ailing below, where we are sitting."

As he said this I felt my face growing yellow. The minister continued: "Still, the danger is not very great. It will only occur in case you are bitten by a female stegomyia that has already fed upon a yellow fever patient. If its bloody jaws get into you, you are gone."

"A stegomyia," said I, inquiringly, thinking of the panthers, tigers, painted rabbits, iguanas and other dangerous beasts of the Isthmus jungles—"a stegomyia! What is a stegomyia? I never heard of it."

"The stegomyia is the yellow fever mosquito. It is about one-third the size of the Jersey mosquito. It is black and white with zebra stripes upon its body

"Well, you must attend to that at once," and with that Minister Barrett went with me to my room and aided me in my anointing. Said he:

"You want a good lot on the tips of your ears, on the backs of your hands, about your ankles, where your legs point the shoes, and you had better put some on your hair and the bald spot on your head, if you have one. Let us do it right now!"

I took the bottle and went through the motions, even to the bald spot on my head, which is as big as a quarter. The result was, when through, I was perfumed like a country barber, and that is my condition as I write this letter. The odor, on the whole, is not unpleasant. I have been here several weeks, and so far no mosquitoes in the world, each having its own characteristics. None of the three I have mentioned is half as large or ferocious as the Jersey mosquito, and they are all getting no more than a passing mention. Each has its own customs and habits. The stegomyia usually bites in the daytime. It avoids bright light, and if a person's hand is on the table it will try to crawl under the hand and bite there. It often breeds in rain barrels and does not like dirty water.

You may imagine, however, that this reception did not soothe my troubled mind. I went to sleep that night under a mosquito net, and dreamed of little devils with zebra stripes of black and white about their bodies and legs, and Secretary Lee, who was in the next room, said I talked in my sleep, saying: "Go